

Political Reviews

The Region in Review: International Issues and Events, 2015

NIC MACLELLAN

Melanesia in Review: Issues and Events, 2015

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The Paris Agreement on Climate Change, adopted by 195 nations, was the culmination of a year of action by Pacific Island governments and communities. Global warming was the central issue of security and rights in 2015, and there were significant advances on regional oceans and climate policy—a positive example of the collective advocacy dubbed the “New Pacific Diplomacy” (Fry and Tarte 2015).

Throughout the year, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) introduced the new Framework on Pacific Regionalism, establishing a process to prioritize regional public policy. Despite improved relations after the 2014 elections in Fiji, Prime Minister Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama again refused to join the annual Forum leaders meeting, held in Port Moresby in September. Papua New Guinea and Fiji continued to assert their leadership ambitions, while governments held summits with India, Japan, France, and Republic of Korea.

There was increasing debate over human rights across the region, on violence against women, the abuse of asylum seekers on Manus and Nauru, and the right to self-determination in non-self-governing territories. Public concern over West Papua prompted debate at the Forum leaders’ meeting, while the Melanesian Spearhead Group expanded its reach to grant associate membership to Indonesia and observer status to a coalition of West Papuan independence groups.

Since her appointment at the 2014 Pacific Islands Forum in Palau, Secretary-General Dame Meg Taylor has bedded down a series of reforms in the Forum Secretariat in Suva. These internal changes come as part of a broader transformation of the regional architecture (MacLellan 2015d) through the Council of Regional Organizations of the Pacific (CROP) and newer institutions like the Fiji-based Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF).

Even as the regional intergovernmental organizations were debating their mandate and structure during 2015, there were significant changes of leadership. As Pacific countries mobilized for the climate negotiations in Paris, the director-general of the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP), David Sheppard, announced his resignation. After six years at the helm, Sheppard was replaced by his former deputy, Kosi Latu of Sāmoa.

At the PIDF, Feleti Teo resigned to take up the position as head of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission in March. Former Fiji Secretary of Foreign Affairs Amena Yauvoli stood in as an interim executive before François Martel of Sāmoa was appointed in September as the full-time PIDF secretary-general. Martel has worked for many years in resource management, biodiversity, conservation, and climate change.

Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) Director-General James Movick completed his first three-year term in

2015 and was endorsed by FFA members to serve a second term to 2018.

In an unexpected move, the director-general of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) secretariat in Port Vila, Peter Forau, resigned his post in November, two years before the end of his second term. Plans to establish “Melanesian Solutions” as the secretariat’s commercial arm could not make up for funding shortfalls as the MSG work program expanded during 2015. Departing his post, Forau also reflected on divergences within the MSG over democracy in Fiji and West Papua: “There have been some influences exerted on some of our members about how they should relate to Fiji during the time when the government was not an elected government. And so some of those relationship issues are still around, and sometimes something has happened between, for example, Papua New Guinea and Fiji” (RNZI 2015). In early 2016, Fiji’s Amena Yauvoli was named as a candidate for the post.

At year’s end, Audrey Aumua was appointed as deputy director-general of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), taking over from Fekita ‘Utoikamanu. As a former World Health Organization regional representative, Dr Aumua will head the SPC’s Suva operations, supporting Director-General Dr Colin Tukuitonga at the SPC’s Nouméa headquarters.

At a CROP meeting in Nouméa in February, agency chiefs agreed to a review of regional governance and financing, to be led by former SPC Director-General Jimmie Rodgers. The collaborative work of the CROP agencies is currently managed through seven CROP Working Groups

on the following: Population and Health (chaired by SPC); Human Resource Development (University of the South Pacific, or USP); Sustainable Development (SPREP and PIFS); Marine Sector (SPC and FFA); Information and Communications Technology (USP); Lands (SPC); and Gender (SPC and PIFS).

The appointment of Dame Meg Taylor as the first female PIFS secretary-general coincided with the replacement of the 2005 Pacific Plan by a new Framework on Pacific Regionalism. For Taylor, “regionalism had lost its politics under the Pacific Plan,” while the new Framework provides “a process for identifying the region’s public policy priorities” (Taylor 2015).

Described as “the master strategy for strengthening cooperation and integration between the states and territories of the Pacific region,” the Framework was tested throughout 2015. The PIFS hopes that the new Framework will help clear a cluttered Forum agenda, narrow the number of items placed before overwhelmed leaders, delegate tasks to regional ministerial meetings, and provide a mechanism for non-state actors to engage in policy formulation.

In April, eight representatives from across the region were appointed to the Framework’s Specialist Subcommittee on Regionalism (SSCR) to manage the process for identifying and prioritizing high-level regional public policy. Chaired by the Forum secretary-general, the members include regional representatives from Melanesia, Polynesia, Micronesia, and Australia/New Zealand, as well as sectoral representatives from Smaller

Island States (SIS), civil society, and the private sector.

PIFS called for submissions on regional initiatives in May; sixty-eight submissions were received and considered by the SSCR in July. The SSCR recommendations were then submitted to the annual Forum Officials Committee in August, before consideration by Forum leaders at their September retreat in Papua New Guinea.

The committee advanced five proposals on climate change, West Papua, information and communications technology, maximizing returns from fisheries, and action on cervical cancer. In Port Moresby, some of these issues were delegated to CROP agencies and ministers for further review, while others were addressed in official statements, such as the 2015 Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Declaration on Climate Change Action.

Compared to the Pacific Plan, which was dominated by technocrats with limited public input, the Framework process has begun with signs of increased transparency. All SSCR submissions were posted online (PIFS 2015d) and nongovernmental organizations gained unprecedented access at the Civil Society Organisation Regional Forum, held before the Port Moresby leaders meeting. Despite this, leading women's activist Claire Slatter has questioned whether the new policy is "old kava in a new tanoa," stating: "For NGOs, the jury is still out on the framework" (Slatter 2015).

At their June summit in Honiara, MSG leaders also endorsed a series of reports and declarations covering trade, policing, sports, violence against women, emergency response coordination, and plans for a center

of excellence on youth development. In a key decision, leaders endorsed the Implementation Framework for the MSG 2038 Prosperity for All Plan, an overarching regional strategy that maps priorities for the next twenty-five years.

For Papua New Guinea, 2015 marked the fortieth anniversary of independence. Port Moresby hosted the fifteenth Pacific Games in July and the forty-sixth Pacific Islands Forum in September. These events were trial runs, as the PNG capital prepares to host the next MSG summit in 2017 and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in 2018—a major challenge for accommodation, transport, security, and communications.

As Forum chair, PNG Prime Minister Peter O'Neill reaffirmed a commitment of aid in the amount of 300 million kina to other Island countries over five years, as a significant part of his country's regional diplomacy (K1.00 is approximately US\$.32). O'Neill has pledged K100 million to Solomon Islands, with a K20 million tranche presented to the Sogavare government at the MSG summit in June. With Smaller Island States angry about the lack of support from the Forum Secretariat in Suva, Papua New Guinea has also pledged US\$3.7 million for the creation of an SIS office.

O'Neill's relationship with Fiji Prime Minister Bainimarama has remained tense, as the two countries joust over regional leadership. The Fiji prime minister attended the MSG summit alongside O'Neill in June but snubbed the Forum leaders meeting in September.

Despite renewed engagement at the official and ministerial level, Bainima-

rama suggested that Fiji would only fully rejoin the Forum if Australia and New Zealand were to leave the organization: “I will not participate in any Forum leaders meeting until the issue of the undue influence of Australia and New Zealand and our divergence of views is addressed” (Bainimarama 2015a). Despite this, Bainimarama visited Australia in October to open the Australia-Fiji Business Forum. Australia’s minister for International Development and the Pacific, Steven Ciobo, visited Fiji three times during the year.

In late 2014, Fiji and Australia proposed a regional gathering of leaders for February 2015, without consulting the Forum chair or secretary-general. The meeting was abandoned in embarrassed silence after a number of countries questioned the agenda. Instead, the inaugural Forum Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting (FFAMM) was held in Sydney in July 2015 to discuss coordination on disaster management and relations with development partners. At the September Forum, leaders agreed that the FFAMM will be an annual event and will be attended by representatives of Forum associate members French Polynesia, New Caledonia, and Tokelau.

By winnowing out the regional agenda through the Framework process and the FFAMM, leaders hope to reduce the number of topics discussed at their annual retreat. NZ Foreign Minister Murray McCully noted: “Forum Leaders have asked for the space to discuss priority strategic issues during their annual Forum meetings. A standing Forum Foreign Ministers meeting would give them this space by taking responsibility for

the more detailed conversations” (PIFS 2015c).

Beyond its Island members, the Forum works with a diverse range of partners, from long-standing donors such as Japan, the European Union (EU), and the United States, to emerging players like China, India, and Indonesia. In a speech in May, PIFS Secretary-General Taylor said: “There is unprecedented interest by a wide range of external actors in our region—some new, some old, and all combined to present a crowded and complex geopolitical landscape” (Taylor 2015).

Taylor noted in her speech: “Presently, it is an uphill battle for the leaders to articulate and put forward their own collective agenda at the regional level when there are so many actors and partners at the table.” During the year, the Forum reassessed the role of the seventeen Post-Forum Dialogue (PFD) partners: Canada, Cuba, People’s Republic of China, European Union, France, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Spain, Thailand, Turkey, United Kingdom, and United States.

In their annual Forum communiqué, leaders “noted with concern that there was limited regional cohesion by PFD partners due to varying levels of regional engagement, therefore making it difficult to identify where the Forum has formed clear issues-based coalitions with partners” (PIFS 2015b). Leaders called for a strengthened annual PFD plenary that should focus on Island priorities, as well as seizing opportunities to talk in the margins of international meetings.

As European fishing nations such as Spain seek to extend operations in

the Pacific, the European Commission has been expanding high-level talks with regional organizations. EU Climate Commissioner Miguel Arias Cañete attended the 2015 Forum, following participation by EU Commission President José Manuel Barroso in 2011, EU Climate Commissioner Connie Hedegaard in 2011 and 2013, and High Representative of the Union for Foreign and Security Policy Baroness Catherine Ashton in 2014.

EU development assistance is largely channeled through the 11th European Development Fund (EDF11), which globally allocates €30.5 billion in 2014–2020 (€1.00 is approximately US\$1.13). As the ACP (African, Caribbean, and Pacific)–EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly convened in Suva in June, the European Union and PIFS signed the EDF11 Regional Indicative Program. Worth €166 million, this program will be allocated between the fifteen Pacific members of the ACP group.

EU trade with the Pacific has increased over the last five years, with nearly half of all Pacific exports in agriculture and 11.6 percent in fisheries (however, this constitutes only 0.1 percent of total EU trade). Despite regular EU expressions of trade support, European fisheries policy is adversely affecting the finalization of a comprehensive regional Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), first proposed in the 2000 ACP–EU Cotonou Treaty.

The regional EPA treaty was due to be finalized in 2007, but there have been no formal negotiations between trade ministers since 2007 or any negotiations between officials since October 2013. The European Union is trying to pressure Pacific countries to

join an interim EPA agreement that Fiji and Papua New Guinea reluctantly adopted in 2009 to guarantee their sugar and fish exports to Europe. But this interim deal has little attraction for smaller island states, especially those without the capacity to establish fish canneries.

At the 2014 Forum in Palau, EU High Representative Catherine Ashton made a firm commitment that Europe would soon finalize the EPA negotiations. Despite this pledge, in May 2015 the European Commission trade commissioner called for deferment of further EPA negotiations for three years, sparking outrage from many Pacific countries. PIFS Secretary-General Taylor said: “For the European Commission to propose a deferment of the negotiations without a formal political dialogue, particularly given its previous assurance to Pacific leaders in 2014, is unacceptable” (PIFS 2015a).

Much as Island governments complain about Canberra’s “boomerang aid,” Australia’s overseas aid program is a model of development effectiveness compared to the European Union’s notorious inflexibility and Japan’s rigid and unresponsive bureaucracy. Despite Japan’s significant bilateral aid and long-term cultural influence in the northern Pacific, Japanese prime ministers rarely visit Pacific Island countries—a sharp contrast to recent engagement by China, Indonesia, and India.

In May, Japan continued its series of Pacific leaders’ summits, known as PALM, organized every three years since 1997. At the seventh PALM Summit in Iwaki City, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe pledged ¥55 billion

(US\$452 million) over the next three years for projects in disasters, climate, fisheries, trade, and tourism.

For some, Tokyo's high-level engagement with the region is becoming a ritual. Fiji's ambassador to Japan has criticized the PALM process, stating: "The issues to be discussed are highly controlled by Japan. There is little real engagement with senior officials from the Pacific Island countries to work up the agenda for PALM and to promote ownership amongst all the parties" (Mataitonga 2014).

The PALM meeting reviewed the controversial Pacific Environment Community (PEC) Fund, a US\$66 million initiative on solar technology established at the 2009 summit. The PEC program was managed through the Forum Secretariat, which is supposed to be a policy body, although energy programs are more often implemented by the SPC. The PEC provided the same amount to each Island nation, even though Ambassador Mataitonga argued: "The one-size-fits-all approach in the provision of development assistance needs to change to focus attention on country specific needs" (Mataitonga 2014).

Japan's aid is subordinate to its fisheries and strategic policy in the Islands region. Japan and the United States are seeking support from Australia and New Zealand for their strategic competition with China in the western Pacific. After passage of controversial security laws by the Abe government, with significant sections of the population and a burgeoning youth movement angered by the integration with US strategic policy, Tokyo is bidding to sell submarines to Australia in competition with France

and Germany, as the Australian government prepares for the replacement of its Collins-class submarine force.

Beyond Japan, other Asian nations are seeking to counter rising Chinese influence in the region. In August, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi hosted the second Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation in Jaipur. Modi made pledges on agriculture, food processing, fisheries, e-networks for telemedicine, solar energy, and climate change. He suggested that a Space Technology Applications Centre could be built in a Pacific country to support telemetry programs for India's burgeoning space program. He also proposed health-care visits to the Islands by the Indian Navy, a goodwill effort already undertaken by the US, Australian, French, and Chinese armed forces (*Times of India* 2015).

Korea is also trying to extend regional ties beyond its embassies in Papua New Guinea and Fiji, through annual regional meetings of senior officials and a triennial Korea-Pacific Foreign Ministers Meeting (first held in 2011). The October 2015 Korea-Pacific officials meeting in Seoul promoted the country's support on climate change, with Korea hosting the new Green Climate Fund Secretariat. In 2015, Seoul doubled its funding to US\$1 million annually for the Korea-Pacific Islands Forum Cooperation Fund, established in 2008.

China's strategy in the region continues to be debated by governments, academics, and think tanks. A major conference on China and the Pacific was held at the National University of Samoa in February (Powles 2016), while the Lowy Institute in Sydney developed an interactive

website to monitor Chinese-funded aid projects, especially as China overtakes Australia as the major aid donor to Fiji.

Over three-quarters of Chinese aid to the region comes as concessional loans, through a US\$2 billion loan facility launched in 2013. Pacific leaders see China's aid program as a supplement to existing aid partners, according to Samoan Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi: "Different countries, development partners of the region, have different priorities, and that's why I mention that China comes in as providing supplementary resources available to the region, covering those areas which are not covered in traditional aid donor programs" (Blades 2015).

In 2015, the China Export Import (Exim) Bank agreed to fund US\$195 million for Papua New Guinea's controversial Pacific Marine Industrial Zone (PMIZ) project, under construction by China's Shenyang International Economic and Technical Cooperation Limited. The PMIZ includes proposals for an export wharf and sewerage plant alongside ten fish-processing plants, near Madang on Papua New Guinea's north coast.

The number of Chinese tourists to Fiji grew from 4,000 (in 2009) to 28,000 (in 2014), and in March 2015, officials announced that Chinese and Fijian nationals can travel to each other's country without a visa.

In June, a series of trade and investment agreements worth US\$331 million were signed at the Fiji-China Economic and Trade Cooperation Conference in Suva. Fiji Trade Minister Faiyaz Koya noted: "The Bainimarama Government is fully

committed to its policy of developing new markets and building new trade relationships. This is by engaging with its non-traditional development partners like China in order to create new trade and investment opportunities that benefit us all" (*Fiji Sun* 2015). The following month, Prime Minister Bainimarama met with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing.

Fiji's growing links with Asia were evident when Thai Prime Minister General Prayut Chan-o-cha visited in September as the chief guest at the PIDF summit. Fiji's role in the UN Asia-Pacific group was highlighted when Peter Thomson, Fiji's UN ambassador, was nominated as the group's candidate for the presidency of the UN General Assembly in 2016. If successful, this would be the first time a Pacific Islands representative has led the General Assembly.

Fiji has also been strengthening links with Russia, as part of Suva's post-coup diversification of diplomatic relations. Fiji Foreign Minister Ratu Inoke Kubuabola said: "The Russian Federation is especially important given the positive and invaluable support that Fiji received from them with regard to UN Peacekeeping Missions, in the face of strong objections from traditional partners" (Fiji Ministry of Information 2014).

Even though Fiji established diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union in 1974, Japan-based diplomat Isikeli Mataitoga only presented his credentials as Fijian ambassador to Russia in 2010. The February 2012 visit to Nadi by Sergei Lavrov was the first by a Russian foreign minister. Prime Minister Bainimarama made a state visit to Moscow in July 2013, the first by a

Fijian leader, signing five cooperation agreements on defense, investment, and trade.

In January 2016, Russia delivered a shipment of containers to Suva, reportedly including small arms, a helicopter, and other military equipment. Acting Fiji Military Forces commander Rear Admiral Viliame Naupoto stated that the equipment will rearm Fijian peacekeepers in place of “outdated weapons” (Doherty 2016). As media speculated on the 2016 arms shipment, a Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson confirmed: “A batch of Russian small arms and munitions is being supplied to Fiji at the official request of that country. These weapons will be used by Fiji’s mechanized infantry battalion which is part of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force deployed in the Golan Heights” (TASS 2016).

In 2014, forty-five Fijian UN peacekeepers were captured in the Golan Heights by the Islamist Al-Nusra Front, highlighting the need for better protection at a time the Vladimir Putin regime has expanded military operations closer to the Israel-Syria border. Speculation that the Russian small arms are a sign of anti-Western alignment was somewhat undercut by the December delivery from Korea of anti-riot guns and teargas grenades (NFP 2016). The Fijian authorities will happily take military support from East and West!

Some Deep Water Fishing Nations (DWFNS) have tried to undercut regional efforts for tuna management. In response, Pacific diplomats have worked to ensure there was a specific goal on the oceans in the new global Sustainable Development Goals

(SDGs). This was achieved when the new global objectives were adopted at a major UN summit in September, with SDG14 on the conservation and sustainable management of oceans and seas.

That month, Fiji Prime Minister Bainimarama told the UN General Assembly: “As a founding member of the UN’s Group of Friends of Oceans and Seas, Fiji has been working to establish a high-level global platform to ensure that we meet SDG14” (Bainimarama 2015c). With support from Sweden, the United Nations will establish Triennial Conferences on Oceans and Seas, with five international conferences spanning the 2015–2030 period of the Sustainable Development Agenda.

During 2015, there were a series of initiatives to advance the oceans agenda, extending the work of the Forum Fisheries Agency and the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA)—one of the success stories of Pacific regionalism.

In May, delegates gathered in Suva for the Pacific Ocean Alliance: High Hopes for High Seas meeting. The alliance, launched at the 2014 Conference on Small Island Developing States, began operations with PIFS’s Dame Meg Taylor as Pacific Ocean commissioner. In a new spirit of cooperation with nongovernmental organizations, the Forum has obtained funding from Conservation International to support the Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner, housed in PIFS. Other green multinationals are working with Pacific nations like Palau and Kiribati to create protected marine zones.

PNA ministers from Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu,

Kiribati, Nauru, Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, and the Marshall Islands met in June in Pohnpei to coordinate management of the skipjack tuna fishery through the Vessel Day Scheme (VDS).

In July, the eleventh FFA ministerial meeting in Tuvalu endorsed a new Regional Roadmap for Sustainable Pacific Fisheries. The strategy aims to document stocks of the four key tuna species in the Pacific, combat Illegal, Unlicensed and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, and bring back bigeye tuna from its current depleted state.

In December, New Zealand's Ambassador for Economic Development Shane Jones angered PNA members by arguing for a quota-based payment system, even though the auctioning of VDS permits has seen an increase in revenues to PNA members from US\$64 million (2010) to US\$357 million (2015). PNA Chief Executive Officer Transform Aqorau said: "You have to really wonder whether there is value in (New Zealand) having a person running around the Pacific rubbishing the (Vessel Day) scheme. . . . Instead of attacking the VDS which is paying for teachers, nurses and doctors, they should be supporting us and the positive work we have done to make nations self-reliant" (Rika 2015).

PNA's success comes as the United States has given notice of plans to withdraw from the South Pacific Tuna Treaty by 2017, ending its most important geopolitical arrangement with the Islands region. The end of the twenty-seven-year-old treaty comes after Washington agreed to pay US\$89 million for its 2016 fishing days and then reneged on the deal. The US deci-

sion means that purse seiners based in American Sāmoa risk being shut out of Pacific Island Exclusive Economic Zones.

Beyond the oceans, 2015 was the year of regional mobilization on climate change, as countries prepared for the December Conference of the Parties (COP21) of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Paris.

The importance of climate action was brought home by disasters across the region, including Cyclone Pam in March. Pam affected 45 percent of Tuvalu's population and also reached Fiji, Kiribati, Solomon Islands, and New Caledonia. Vanuatu was hardest hit—Pam's 270 kilometer/hour winds destroyed critical infrastructure in Port Vila and rural centers, leaving tens of thousands of people without homes and damaging food gardens. Damage was estimated at US\$450 million—64 percent of the country's gross domestic product (ADB 2015).

A strong El Niño Southern Oscillation in 2015–16 has also caused significant drought and frosts across Melanesia and eastern Australia, with negative impacts on agriculture, water supply, women's labor, and village health. By year's end, up to 770,000 people in Papua New Guinea were living in locations where food was very scarce or extremely scarce (Bourke, Allen, and Lowe 2016). Some villagers in Vanuatu became reliant on food aid because crops were growing slowly after being wiped out by Cyclone Pam, although the innovative nongovernmental organization program Yumi Stap Redi Long Klaemet Jenis had successfully prepared many villages through

community resilience initiatives (MacIellan 2015e).

Climate policy caused tensions within the Pacific Islands Forum, as countries debated divergent priorities between Australia, New Zealand, and the Forum Island Countries. Ongoing tensions between PIFS and PIDF were highlighted by a series of declarations on climate change in the lead-up to the Paris negotiations.

In May, Prime Minister Bainimarama argued: “As we see it, Australia and New Zealand have been put to the test on climate change and been found wanting. So it should be no surprise that we have formed the view that at the very least, their position as full members of our island nation Forum needs to be questioned, re-examined and redefined. They simply do not represent our interests as we face this critical matter of survival” (Bainimarama 2015a).

Ahead of COP21, Kiribati President Anote Tong wrote to world leaders asking them to back a global moratorium on new coal mines and mine expansions—a challenge to Australia, which plans new mines in Queensland’s Galilee basin. Tong rejected the excuse by Australian politicians that coal is necessary to lift people out of energy poverty: “I keep hearing this argument that it’s about the poor. Well, we are the poor and we will disappear. I don’t think it’s about the poor, it’s about the rich” (Pacnews 2015).

In July, the Polynesian Leaders Group issued the Taputapuātea Declaration on Climate Change, while in early September, the PIDF issued the Suva Declaration on Climate Change, and the Smaller Island States delivered

a tough statement as they caucused before the Forum. All called for the Paris Agreement to limit global average temperature increase to less than 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels, a stronger target than Australia and New Zealand have accepted.

A week after the PIDF summit, Forum leaders met in Port Moresby. With Australia and New Zealand in the room, the resulting Forum Declaration on Climate Change was weaker than the PIDF’s Suva Declaration. Media and community reaction forced the PIFS to release a defensive statement, stressing the positive elements of the Forum declaration (CROP 2015).

In November, the Green Climate Fund (GCF) announced its first round of eight grants, including a US\$31 million water supply and waste project in Fiji. After the defeat of conservative Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott by his more liberal colleague Malcolm Turnbull, Australia has rejoined the GCF board as co-chair.

In December, Pacific governments and nongovernmental organizations made strong interventions in the global climate talks in Paris. Marshall Islands Foreign Minister Tony de Brum played a leading role in the “Higher Ambition” Coalition, which forged a broad alliance to strengthen commitments from industrialized nations.

The final Paris Agreement includes several crucial elements for the Pacific, including the aspirational goal limiting temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels, a strengthened mechanism for loss and damage, and the provision for scaled-up and simplified access to climate finance for small island developing states.

Despite this, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) nations continue to prevaricate over commitments on climate financing, current emissions reduction targets still guarantee temperature increases of 2.7 to 3.4 degrees, and the Paris agreement includes an explicit clause stating that “Article 8 of the Agreement does not involve or provide a basis for any liability or compensation” (COP21 2015).

Beyond the campaign for climate justice, there were extensive public debates about human rights across the region. As the UN Human Rights Council conducted its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of human rights in Kiribati, Minister for Women Tangariki Reete said that climate change continues to be one of the country’s biggest threats to upholding human rights (Radio Australia 2015).

During the year, the United Nations also conducted UPRs for the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, and Australia. For the latter two countries, the UPRs revealed widespread international concern over the offshore processing of asylum seekers, with a hundred countries formally raising issues with Australian government policy. The UN Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture visited Nauru in February, calling for changes in the operation of Australia’s asylum-seeker detention center (UNSPT 2015).

Other independent reviews into treatment of refugees on Nauru have revealed damning evidence about the prevalence of sexual and physical assault. A report on children in detention by the Australian Human Rights Commission found: “Children on

Nauru are suffering from extreme levels of physical, emotional, psychological and developmental distress. The Commission finds that the inevitable and foreseeable consequence of Australia’s transfer of children to Nauru is that they would be detained in breach of article 37(b) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child” (AHRC 2015, 200).

In the face of reports on assault, abuse, and rape in the centers, then Immigration Minister Scott Morrison falsely claimed in 2014 that staff from Save the Children working in Nauru were making false reports and coaching detainees. Two reviews in 2015 confirmed that there is no evidence to back up these claims, and the Australian government apologized and paid compensation to Save the Children (Moss 2015).

Nauru Justice Minister David Adeang defended his country’s human rights record, even as critics challenged Nauru’s treatment of opposition members of Parliament (Farrell 2015). Two opposition members were briefly jailed and MP Roland Kun was denied a passport to reunite with his family overseas. In response to international concern, New Zealand suspended its aid funding for Nauru’s judicial system.

In April, the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) held a special half-day session on the Pacific Islands. Aboriginal legal scholar Professor Megan Davis of Australia served as chair of the 2015 Permanent Forum in New York, which recommended that “the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees focus on the vulnerability of indigenous peoples in the Pacific region,

particularly in view of the effects of climate change” (UNPFII 2015b).

In a statement, a caucus of Pacific groups from Guam, Papua New Guinea, Aotearoa/New Zealand, and Hawai‘i condemned the failure of the United Nations to develop “a concrete plan to implement the Right of Self Determination and delist the UN Non-Self Governing Territories” (UNPFII 2015a).

Ever since the UN General Assembly re-listed French Polynesia as a non-self-governing territory in May 2013, France has stubbornly refused to acknowledge the authority of the United Nations over self-determination in French Polynesia. As required under Article 73e of the UN Charter, France submitted information to the United Nations about New Caledonia in 2014 and 2015; however, Paris refused to formally submit information on French Polynesia in either year (UNGA 2015, 3).

During 2015, MSG leaders continued to publicly support independence leader Oscar Temaru’s call for talks on self-determination. Reaffirming the “inalienable right of the people of French Polynesia to self-determination,” Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare told the UN General Assembly on 1 October: “Solomon Islands calls on the administering power to fully cooperate with the work of the Special Committee. We note that 30 years of nuclear testing by the administrative power caused widespread atomic radiation and has resulted in considerable health and environmental concerns” (Sogavare 2015).

Throughout the year, France and the governments of New Caledonia and French Polynesia lobbied

to upgrade their membership in the Pacific Islands Forum from associate to full membership. France’s Overseas Minister George Pau-Langevin lobbied at the 2015 Post-Forum Dialogue, while the French Polynesia government raised the issue as President Édouard Fritch hosted the Polynesian Leaders Group summit in Tahiti.

In July, the Forum sent a special ministerial mission, led by PNG Foreign Minister Rimbink Pato, to French Polynesia to assess the application. When Forum leaders considered the ministerial mission report, however, they once again deferred a decision. A key concern was whether the existing governance arrangements of French Polynesia would enable its government “to participate independently and effectively as a full member, in the full complement of political deliberation, decision making and commitments of the Forum” (PIFS 2015b, item 23). This was a diplomatic reference to France’s ongoing control of the judiciary, defense, and other key sectors (Corbin 2013).

France continued to lobby for the change at the November 2015 France-Oceania summit in Paris. French President François Hollande stated: “I hope that the Pacific Islands Forum could welcome to its breast both New Caledonia and French Polynesia as full members, and Wallis and Futuna as an associate member. These three territories will be our representatives” (*Les Nouvelles Calédonniennes* 2015). The issue now returns to the Forum Secretariat, which will conduct a review of the criteria for admission of new Forum members. This review will be submitted to the 2016 Forum Officials Committee for consideration, before it

is sent back to Pacific foreign ministers and leaders.

France's regional relations are still affected by memories of past nuclear policies. On the thirtieth anniversary of the French terrorist attack against the *Rainbow Warrior*, and the seventieth anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Pacific governments spoke out on nuclear issues. At the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference in May, Papua New Guinea joined other Pacific countries to call for more urgent action on nuclear disarmament (Maclellan 2015b).

As well as decolonization in territories under the mandate of the UN Special Committee, there are other self-determination struggles in post-colonial nations that are increasingly affecting regional relations, such as West Papua (Indonesia), Bougainville (Papua New Guinea), and Rapa Nui (Chile).

Chile's colonial policy in Rapa Nui provides a strategic foothold in the eastern Pacific, at a time Chile is joining other Pacific Rim countries in the Transpacific Partnership Agreement. Chilean and French forces conduct regular joint search-and-rescue maneuvers, while Chilean officials attended the South Pacific Defense Ministers' Meeting in Port Moresby in April. Chilean military personnel regularly serve alongside US, Australian, and New Zealand naval forces in regional military exercises such as RIMPAC, Pacific Partnership, and UNITAS (Chandramohan 2015).

Bougainville poses a looming challenge for the Forum and the Melanesian Spearhead Group, with a proposed referendum on self-deter-

mination to be held over the next five years. Port Moresby is sensitive about external interference in Bougainville, highlighted by PNG government anger over Australia's announcement of plans to expand diplomatic representation in Buka. Despite this, the Pacific Islands Forum deployed an elections monitoring team in May to observe elections for the Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG), led by Fiji and Vanuatu officials. President John Momis was returned to office over eight other candidates.

Momis has argued that independence for Bougainville can only be secured by reinvigorating extractive industries, including the Panguna gold and copper mine. In March, the ABG enacted the Bougainville Mining Act 2015, transforming rights for Bougainville Copper Ltd (BCL), the Rio Tinto subsidiary that ran the Panguna mine until the conflict of the 1990s. Since passage of the Mining Act, there has been widespread debate about customary landowner rights, especially following media reports that the PNG government might purchase BCL's Panguna stake (Jubilee Australia 2015).

The regional debate over West Papua made significant advances in 2015 (Maclellan 2015a). The Facebook generation across Melanesia is ramping up the pressure and Pacific governments are starting to take notice: the issue was included in the agenda of both the MSG summit in Honiara and the Forum leaders meeting in Port Moresby.

In December 2014, Vanuatu churches and customary chiefs, supported by the government, hosted a meeting to form a united front

between three strands of the West Papuan nationalist movement, uniting Jayapura-based activists and exiled campaigners. In February 2015, the newly created United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP) submitted an application for full MSG membership.

Indonesia worked to blunt the diplomatic advances of the West Papuan nationalist movement. In March, Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi traveled to Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Fiji. In May—a month before the MSG summit—President Joko Widodo visited West Papua and Papua New Guinea, announcing clemency for five political prisoners and other concessions.

With Papua New Guinea maintaining close ties to its Asian neighbor, Fiji has also improved ties to Jakarta, symbolized by former Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono opening the 2014 PIDF summit and Indonesia's role in co-chairing the Multinational Observer Group for Fiji's elections. At the MSG summit, Prime Minister Bainimarama stated: "Indonesian sovereignty over West Papua cannot be questioned. . . . the MSG has no choice but to deal with Indonesia in a positive and constructive manner. The best hope for improving the lives of the people of West Papua is to work closely with the Indonesian government, one of the most vibrant democracies in the world" (Bainimarama 2015b).

In contrast to Fiji and Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands under Prime Minister Sogavare has expanded diplomatic support for the West Papuan nationalist movement. This complements long-standing solidarity from

Vanuatu and New Caledonia's Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS). On the eve of the MSG summit, outgoing MSG Chair Victor Tutugoro of the FLNKS publicly expressed reservations about Indonesia expanding its role in the MSG: "For the FLNKS, the MSG is an organisation of Melanesian countries. As I see it, Indonesia is not part of the Melanesian bloc" (Maclellan 2015a).

The divergent views among Melanesian leaders were brought to a head at the Honiara summit in a historic decision to expand the MSG's reach. An uneasy consensus led to the granting of associate member status to Indonesia and observer status to the ULMWP. To dodge questions over Indonesian sovereignty, the MSG leaders agreed that "the ULMWP be admitted as an observer under the regional and international category representing Melanesians living abroad," despite the ULMWP representing groups both inside and exiled from West Papua (MSG 2015, 6).

In the presence of a large Indonesian delegation—but not the governors of Papua and West Papua provinces—the Island leaders approved "that associate membership be accorded to Indonesia representing the five Melanesian provinces in Indonesia" (Papua, West Papua, Maluku, North Maluku, and East Nusa Tenggara). The future role of the five governors is unclear, given the historic difference between Papua and West Papua (which remained under Dutch administration until the 1960s) and the other three provinces (which were part of Indonesia from independence in 1949).

The issue of West Papua has not been considered by the Pacific Islands

Forum since 2006, but it was one of five core topics proposed to Forum leaders through the Framework on Pacific Regionalism. At the Forum, leaders recognized Indonesia's sovereignty over the Papuan provinces but "called on all parties to protect and uphold the human rights of all residents in Papua and to work to address the root causes of such conflicts by peaceful means" (PIFS 2015b). Forum Chair Peter O'Neill was tasked with consulting with Indonesia on a possible fact-finding mission to discuss the situation in West Papua.

The message about dialogue hasn't gotten through to Indonesia's hard-line defense minister, Ryamizard Ryacudu, with the former army chief of staff stating that West Papua should not be an issue for regional discussion: "There are countries that are getting involved in the issue of Papua. For us, Papua is in the United Republic of Indonesia. There is no other solution to talk about it, that's it, that's the way it is. So this is so that everyone will know that that doesn't need to be spoken about" (Nicholson 2015).

Beyond debates over self-determination, the rights of women in Papua New Guinea and other Island nations raised international comment, with extensive reporting of violence against women and children. A Human Rights Watch report on family violence in Papua New Guinea called on the PNG government to expedite the implementation of the 2013 Family Protection Act (HRW 2015).

Following publication of government documents by Edward Snowden, Wikileaks, and other whistle-blowers, there is renewed evidence of intelligence surveillance in the Pacific

Islands by the so-called "five eyes alliance": the US National Security Agency (NSA), the Australian Signals Directorate (ASD), the NZ Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB), the Communications Security Establishment Canada (CSEC), and the UK Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ).

Documents released in 2015 show that New Zealand's electronic surveillance agency GCSB is targeting most Pacific Island neighbors (Hager and Gallagher 2015c). Since 2009, the GCSB intelligence base at Waihopai has moved to "full-take collection," indiscriminately intercepting Asia-Pacific communications and providing them en masse to the NSA through the controversial intelligence system XKeyscore, which is used to monitor e-mails and Internet browsing habits.

According to other documents, the ASD has also been targeting telecommunications in Indonesia and the Pacific Islands. *The Age* newspaper reported that "ASD and GCSB personnel intercepted mobile phone calls from a signals intelligence collection facility near Honiara, codenamed CAPRICA and probably located at Camp RAMSI, the headquarters of the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands. With a view to expanding coverage of Solomon Telekom's network, the ASD and GCSB also conducted a radio frequency survey, codenamed PREBOIL, at the Australian Federal Police facility at the Guadalcanal Beach Resort near Henderson Airport" (Dorling 2015).

According to another NSA document, New Zealand's GCSB also targeted government officials in Solomon Islands during 2013. These included

the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the prime minister's chief of staff and permanent secretary, a senior foreign affairs official, and even a leading anti-corruption campaigner, Benjamin Afuga of Forum Solomon Islands International (Hager and Gallagher 2015a, 2015b).

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